

INCOMING AIRGRAM

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Rarely has a statement by a prominent American official aroused as much consternation, outrage and anger as Senator Fulbright's recent television interview. He is quoted as favoring disengagement in Central Europe, ban on nuclear-capable weapons for Bundeswehr, free city status for Berlin and large peace conference. Although all of these proposals are anathema to West German officials and political leaders, their greatest wrath was directed against the Senator's alleged proposal to make concession to Communist Bloc whereby stream of refugees from Soviet Zone would be stopped. Senator Fulbright is quoted as saying, in this connection, "I believe one would not give up very much because they (the Russians) in my opinion could close the borders whenever they wished without violating a contractual right. We do not have the right to demand from them that they permit refugees to come over". Subsequent editions of various papers did carry a denial by Senator and member of his staff that he had recommended closing door to refugees. They also reported unnamed source in State Department as stating that Fulbright was member of Congress and that his suggestions, consequently, imposed no obligation on Executive.

Government circles in Bonn were quoted as terming Fulbright's alleged proposal on refugees as "morally and politically, completely unrealistic". A relatively junior Foreign Ministry official said privately that he and his colleagues thought that Fulbright's remarks constituted greatest mistake yet made by Western leader apropos of Berlin situation. Mayor Willy Brandt of Berlin is quoted as saying that he could not believe that Fulbright had really made such a statement regarding refugees. He went on to reject, however, any thought that refugees provided a useful concession, and he said freedom of travel between divisions of Germany had to be maintained. Federal Minister for All-German Affairs Lemmer said flatly that

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Fulbright's suggestions were "unacceptable". FRG leader Erich Mende also rejected Senator's repeated proposals. Influential but non-governmental reaction was illustrated by the phone call of leading West German publisher, Axel Springer, to Embassy Press Attache, in which Springer asked for text of remarks and expressed his dismay and indignation.

More ominous conclusion was drawn by editorial writer in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung who implied strongly that Fulbright's ideas would have considerable impact on American government because of Senator's influence, and that his concepts were realistic as Germans might discover after German elections were over.

While Embassy has not as yet received text of Senator's remarks, and they may prove more innocuous than reported by German press, it seems clear that suspicion and uneasiness regarding U.S. position on Berlin will persist for some little time in German governmental and political circles.

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